



Sony Electronics Improves Collaboration, Information Access, and Productivity

Overview

Country or Region: United States

Industry: Manufacturing—Electronics

Customer Profile

Sony is a global technology and entertainment company with more than 170,000 employees. The company had nearly U.S.\$80 billion in 2008 sales.

Business Situation

With employees and information spread across many different locations, Sony was looking for ways to improve information access, enhance collaboration, and make better use of internal expert resources.

Solution

Building on its implementation of Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, Sony became an early adopter of Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010, using it to enhance the corporate intranet.

Benefits

- Increased innovation and sense of community
- Better access to information and in-house expertise
- Higher productivity, lower costs, faster development

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Sony Electronics provides audio/video electronics and information technology products for the consumer and professional markets. As part of Sony Corporation, Sony Electronics employees collaborate with colleagues in offices around the world. The company sought a more efficient way to organize and search for documents on the corporate intranet, while also making it simpler for employees to connect with each other and share expertise. By deploying Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007 and becoming an early adopter of Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010, Sony Electronics has given employees advanced document sharing capabilities and a more effective and easily searchable intranet, saving time and boosting productivity. Ready access to internal experts also saves consulting costs, and development time on key projects has been cut from three to six months to three to six weeks.

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Situation

Headquartered in San Diego, California, Sony Electronics is a leading provider of popular consumer and professional electronic products. The company’s operations include research and development, design, engineering, manufacturing, sales, marketing, distribution, and customer service. Sony Electronics is part of Sony Corporation, which is ranked as one of the world’s 100 largest companies by Forbes magazine. The company’s other divisions include Sony Pictures Entertainment, Sony Music Entertainment, and Sony Corporation of America.

As a company producing cutting-edge technology, Sony Corporation promotes innovative thinking internally, and the Sony Electronics division is at the forefront of that effort. “Innovation is important to us,” says Sal Rosales, SharePoint Architect at Sony Electronics. “Innovation got us where we are today, and we need to continue innovating to move forward. We have a lot of competition challenging our traditional market areas, so there’s a big push for us to improve the ways we generate and use information across the enterprise.”

With corporate, engineering, research, and manufacturing sites spread across the United States and around the globe, Sony Electronics faced challenges in communication across divisions and between employees. “Everyone was operating as an island,” explains Jim Whitmoyer, Business Applications Manager at Sony Electronics. “We’d talk with colleagues, but there wasn’t a lot of communication between our U.S. and European offices, for example. So, we looked for ways to take charge and build stronger partnerships between our sister companies, while expanding the

boundaries of innovation through collaboration.”

Without a robust collaboration system in place, employees were exchanging ideas and plans mostly through e-mail, which overloaded inboxes and created document versioning issues. “I was on a number of distribution lists, and I got up to 300 e-mails a day,” says Whitmoyer. “I couldn’t just discard them because there might be something in them I needed to know about. Also, if I sent a document to 10 people and three of those people modified it and sent it back out, we’d then have multiple versions but no version history or tracking.”

Sony is also constantly seeking to innovate and modernize its information infrastructure to better meet the expectations and working styles of the next generation of employees. Sony is placing a greater emphasis on telecommuting, and employees want the company to adopt the same types of social networking technologies that they use in other areas of daily life. “We have a lot of affinity groups at Sony, and one of them is targeted at new, young employees who are joining the company,” says Whitmoyer. “Young employees are very excited about social computing because they know they can use it to easily connect with people, at home and at work.”

“We have lots of tech-savvy people,” adds Rosales. “They’re used to using MySpace, Facebook, Twitter, and similar sites. They want to see that same sort of functionality—search and chat, for example—available from their desktop at work, and they want to connect to internal resources from anywhere.”

Additionally, Sony Electronics employees faced challenges navigating the vast amounts of information on the corporate network and tapping into expert resources within the company. "We have so many different business units and had so much data floating around," says Rosales. "In order to work effectively and continue to innovate, we need to be able to search for relevant data and pinpoint its owners and authors very quickly."

Sony Electronics sought a solution that would support its goals to promote innovation through collaboration and efficient access to information and expertise across corporate boundaries.

Solution

Given its positive experiences with Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007, Sony Electronics was excited to accelerate its internal culture of innovation with Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010. The company wanted to take advantage of new features such as an improved user interface, enhanced wiki functionality, and more robust search capabilities.

IT staff at Sony had also made a lot of customizations to its Office SharePoint Server 2007 environment. These included developing forms with the Microsoft InfoPath information-gathering program, implementing new workflows, branding the corporate intranet, and creating custom ASPX pages. Other customizations included wiki tagging, FAST search refinements, and controls built using the Microsoft Silverlight browser plug-in. As a result, one of the important steps in the deployment of SharePoint Server 2010 has been to move these customizations into the new version's test environment. "We're

migrating our environment on a site-by-site basis and verifying that the sites still work," says Whitmoyer. "Where they don't work, we're making further customizations. Fortunately, almost everything we developed in Office SharePoint Server 2007 works in SharePoint Server 2010."

To address the company's search needs, Sony Electronics also deployed Microsoft FAST Search Server 2010 for SharePoint. This software complements the search and integration capabilities of SharePoint Server 2010 by adding a more engaging and conversational search experience, and context to provide specific search experiences for different needs. It also offers advanced content processing to create metadata and add structure to unstructured content.

With the deployment of SharePoint Server 2010 complete, the new collaboration solution is already making a positive business impact. Whitmoyer says, "We currently have the entire Enterprise edition of SharePoint Server 2010 installed, and it has been a pretty painless migration for us. This frees our team to do more sophisticated customizations using SharePoint integration with the Microsoft Visual Studio 2010 development system and Microsoft .NET Framework 3.5."

Benefits

By deploying a collaboration solution based on SharePoint Server 2010 and FAST Search Server 2010 for SharePoint, Sony Electronics is promoting innovation and building a stronger sense of community. Employees have better access to information and in-house expertise, increasing productivity and

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lowering costs, and the company speeds through application development.

Increased Innovation and Sense of Community

At Sony Electronics, innovation thrives on employees interacting and exchanging ideas. To promote this interaction, the company is taking advantage of SharePoint features that foster a greater sense of community in the virtual environment.

For example, Sony Electronics is using enhanced wiki capabilities to capture employees' insights and comments, employ corporate governance to manage this content, and efficiently search through the content and apply it where it is needed. Whitmoyer says, "With wiki functionality in SharePoint Server, we're building what we call SonyPedia—bringing together insights from employees across the enterprise into a single body of knowledge, driving us toward a more unified company."

Similarly, Sony Electronics recognizes that it can be difficult for new employees at such a large organization to locate necessary resources and connect with peers. To address this issue, the company is using the solution's robust My Site pages and people search feature to identify people who have similar innovation interests or who work on similar projects. "With SharePoint Server, we expect that as new employees come in they will connect quickly with co-workers," says Whitmoyer. "And as we go through organizational changes, we also expect that existing employees will integrate quickly with a new team. It's a great tool for people to get connected with other people."

Rosales adds, "My Sites give us a deeper understanding of our employees' work skills and interests, and provide a much richer organizational view that helps Sony better leverage the potential of its human resources for better innovation."

As another example, the implementation of a central repository for sharing files has made it easier for employees to collaboratively write, edit, and exchange documents. This eliminates the need to e-mail the documents back and forth and resolves versioning issues. "We've been able to cut down on the roundabout communication that was going on before," says Whitmoyer. "We can share documents through a library or desktop sharing, which makes it simple to manage everyone's revisions. We republish documents and use RSS feeds to get updates, so there's no need to use e-mail—we have a single source of truth."

Finally, tighter integration between SharePoint Server 2010 and Microsoft Office Communications Server 2007 has made it simpler for colleagues to communicate who are telecommuting or located in other offices. This includes the ability to immediately call one another directly on the computer. Rosales says, "Connecting people via the integration with Microsoft Office Communicator and the Microsoft Office suites helps drive innovation instantly—anytime, anywhere."

Whitmoyer adds, "Collaborating through SharePoint Server, I'm connected all the time. It's really like people are in the next cubicle, whether they're 1 mile away or 100 miles away."

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Better Access to Information and In-House Expertise

There is a vast amount of information on the Sony Electronics intranet, and in the past, it was difficult to narrow down search results to find a particular document. Now, IT staff has indexed internal documents with FAST Search Server 2010 for SharePoint, and this has made it significantly easier to track down desired files. Whitmoyer says, "By indexing our entire SharePoint environment with FAST search technologies and its ability to navigate through the search results, a user can immediately narrow an ambiguous search request to a very focused set of relevant results."

The new solution also helps to find relevant people, not just information, which has traditionally been difficult. "We have a lot of knowledge in-house at Sony Electronics, and there are lots of workers with specialized expertise," adds Whitmoyer. "Using the people and expertise search capabilities of SharePoint Server 2010, we can easily find people internally who have the passion and skills to help with a particular project, rather than hiring a consultant. And because employees are able to advertise their expertise online, they may find new job opportunities within the company."

Higher Productivity, Lower Costs, Faster Development

The improved access to stored information and internal experts translates directly into cost savings—by avoiding hiring outside consultants—and into time savings and higher productivity. Whitmoyer observes, "Employees are more productive using FAST search technologies, with greater control over how they search. As a result,

they find the documents they need much quicker than before. Plus, project managers can use people search to proactively look across the company and find an expert for a project in its earliest stages."

For the solution in general, Whitmoyer adds, "Difficult tasks like precisely finding relevant documents or specialized expertise across a large corporation can be cut from weeks to minutes using SharePoint Server."

Another way that the solution saves time is by streamlining the application development processes. "With SharePoint Server, we can reduce our IT costs and achieve a quicker time-to-market on new projects within the company," says Whitmoyer. "Where development might have taken three to six months before, now we can complete it in three to six weeks."

On the solution as a whole, he concludes, "Microsoft really got it right with SharePoint Server 2010."

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Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010

Microsoft SharePoint Server 2010 is the business collaboration platform for the Enterprise and the Internet.

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